



SOUTHWESTERN  
COMMUNITIES COALITION

October 10, 2019

Hon. Jared Huffman  
Chairman  
Water, Oceans and Wildlife Subcommittee  
The House Committee on Resources  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Questions for the Record submitted by Rep. Jeff Van Drew

Dear Mr. Chairman:

This is in response to the request for Questions for the Record, submitted by Rep. Van Drew, pursuant to the September 24, 2019 hearing before the Subcommittee on Water, Oceans and Wildlife at which I testified.

It must be noted that I would have responded sooner, and by the October 8 deadline, but I did not receive the questions in the mail until October 9. Hence, I am responding at the earliest date I am able.

As for Rep. Van Drew's questions, along with my answers, are as follows:

*Q: How much could coastal districts who rely heavily on healthy habitat to support fisheries and other wildlife for birdwatching, recreation, fishing, and tourism have to lose economically should wetlands continue to be lost?*

**A:** Coastal ecosystems are vital to the continued ecological and economic health of the districts in which they fall. Wetlands, freshwater, saltwater and brackish, are vital because they support such a wide range of biodiversity. Innovation and flexibility is key to wetland conservation, especially because private landowners own 70% of America's wetlands, according to PERC.<sup>1</sup> One such innovation is conservation of so-called pop-up wetlands, an initiative that involves The Nature Conservancy and others. That said, the role over-regulation can take also needs to be considered. According to Jonathan Adler, noted legal scholar, about the EPA's 2015 definition of WOTUS (waters of the United States):

“Yet more regulation does not always translate into more conservation, particularly if regulatory resources are spread thin and

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.perc.org/2016/02/02/world-wetlands-day-2016/>



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applied in an unfocused manner. By expanding regulatory authority, the agencies may crowd out potentially complementary efforts by state and local governments and conservation organizations.”<sup>2</sup>

*Q: How do wetlands benefit hunters and fishermen?*

A: According to the EPA:

“In 2001, approximately 3 million people hunted migratory birds, and 6.5 million small mammals that are often found in wetlands. They spent more than \$2.2 billion, including \$111million paid by migratory bird and large game hunters to lease hunting areas and blinds, often located on private property with wetlands. (Source: U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service).”<sup>3</sup>

In addition, “over 34 million people went fishing in 2001, spending an average of \$1,046 and 16 days each on the water. Anglers spent \$14.7 billion in 2001 for fishing trips, \$17 billion on equipment and \$4 billion for licenses, stamps, tags, land leasing and ownership, membership dues, contributions and magazines.”<sup>4</sup>

*Q: How will the \$18 million increase in annual appropriated funds further wetland conservation?*

A: While funds have the potential to further wetland conservation, reducing the regulatory burden on America’s landowners would likely be more beneficial. As noted above in answer to the first question, America’s landowners own 70% of the nation’s wetlands. Many of these landowners are working landowners—farmers, ranchers and woodland owners—who depend on income from their land for some or their entire income. This fact, coupled with Prof. Adler’s observation that more wetland regulation can inhibit wetland conservation, means that making regulations more landowner-friendly, less onerous and less coercive will likely improve wetland conservation.

Sincerely,

Brian Seasholes  
Executive Director  
Southwestern Communities Coalition

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.perc.org/2015/12/04/redefining-the-waters-of-the-united-states/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-02/documents/economicbenefits.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2016-02/documents/economicbenefits.pdf>